



**Government Response to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs
Committee Report: UK Government policy on the Kurdistan Region
of Iraq**

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign and
Commonwealth Affairs by Command of Her Majesty

March 2015



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COMMAND PAPER: GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE REPORT: UK GOVERNMENT POLICY ON THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

The Government welcomes the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on the UK's policy towards the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, published on 21 January 2015.

This Command Paper sets out the Government's response to each of the Committee's conclusions and recommendations. The Committee's text is in bold and the Government's response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to the Committee's report.

The Kurdistan Region's dispute with Baghdad, and the UK's role

1. It is for the people of Iraq, and their governments, to sort out their disagreements, and by constitutional means. Where the UK considers that Iraq's constitution is not being respected, by either the federal or Kurdistan Regional Government, it should not be afraid to express views, but should be mindful that the UK's complex history of involvement in Iraq may not always make it best placed to be a candid friend. We expect that in the vast majority of cases, it is best that advice and views are offered through private and informal channels, as appears to currently be the case. Whatever Iraq's long-term future, we agree with the UK Government that its current diplomatic priority should be to help all of Iraq's communities and democratic institutions, including the federal and Kurdistan Regional Governments, mend fences and unite against the threat from ISIL. (Paragraph 33)

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion. In December 2014, the Government of Iraq (GoI) and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) came to an agreement over their long-standing dispute around allocations of federal government revenue and exports from the energy sector. This was an historic deal and a crucial example for Iraq's friends in the international community, including the UK, of the willingness of Iraq's political establishment to work together to resolve the challenges they face. We hope the agreement will lay the foundation for greater cooperation between the GoI and KRG in other areas, especially in the fight against ISIL. Throughout the negotiation process our Ambassador and his team in Baghdad and the Consul General in Erbil worked behind the scenes in support of the agreement and were thanked for their efforts afterwards. They will continue to do so to ensure the deal holds and to encourage greater cooperation in the future.

The Kurdistan Regional Government as a partner for the UK Government, and its record on democracy and human rights

2. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq is a genuine democracy, albeit an imperfect and still developing one, and a beacon of tolerance and moderation in a wider region where extremism and instability are on the rise. Its values are broadly our values. The UK is fortunate to have in such a volatile part of the world a partner as relatively moderate, pragmatic, stable, democratic, secular and reflexively pro-Western as the KRG. It is emphatically in the best interests of the UK that the Kurdistan Region continues on its path of democratic development, and has friends and supporters as it does so, particularly at this time of crisis for the Region, when the progress it has achieved over the last 20 years is under threat. The UK Government should engage with it on that basis. (Paragraph 47)

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion. Through our Consulate General in Erbil and Embassy in Baghdad we continue to invest heavily in the vibrant partnership that the UK

already enjoys with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, in addition to the UK's relationship with Iraq more generally.

3. The Kurdistan Regional Government acknowledges ongoing challenges in developing its democratic institutions and its human and civil rights culture, and in advancing gender equality, and should be judged on how it responds to these challenges. There are also concerns as to public corruption and media freedom that it must address. In addition, as the Kurdistan Regional Government has stated that it would welcome the UK's mentoring and support in connection with some of these areas, we urge the UK Government to respond positively to this invitation. (Paragraph 48)

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion. The UK is already providing support in the areas suggested, including through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the National School of Government – International. Through our Consulate General in Erbil and our contacts with Kurdish representatives in London, we maintain a regular dialogue with the KRG in order to identify where support is required and in what areas the UK is able to add most value.

In recent months, we have heard uncorroborated reports of abuses by KRG agencies, including denial of access to the Kurdistan Region for people in need and coerced displacement; we have expressed our concerns to the KRG and will continue to do so on this, as well as on any other reports of abuses by the authorities.

Strategic value of the UK-Kurdistan Region relationship

4. The Kurdistan Regional Government has strategic value for the UK Government as a bridge to other regional powers with whom direct dialogue may be difficult, but which the UK must work with in order to achieve the policies to which it is committed. We urge the UK Government to be mindful that if it is unable fully to reciprocate the Kurdistan Regional Government's offer of closer partnership, the KRG might be reluctantly compelled to look elsewhere for support including to regimes whose values and interests do not always match those of the UK. (Paragraph 55)

The Government endorses the conclusion that the KRG, alongside our relationship with Iraq more generally, is a strategic partner and important for the delivery of UK policy in the region. The UK has a strong and vibrant relationship with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq spanning a wide range of areas. Alongside shared interests in the KRI's stability and development, these links are the foundation of the healthy relationship we enjoy today. We are working to strengthen commercial, cultural and educational links between the UK and Iraqi Kurds. This is a genuine partnership, involving the private and other sectors, as well as direct engagement between the KRG and HMG.

In May 2014, KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, accompanied by a selection of his Ministers and advisers, made an official visit to the UK. During his time in London PM Barzani met the Foreign Secretary, the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, five other HMG Ministers as well as the Mayor of London and the Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Iraq. The visit highlighted a number of possible areas for increased cooperation and partnership which we are now working to take forward.

It is important to note that more companies from Britain than from any other EU country are registered with the KRG and we hope more will follow. We are not complacent however, and know that many countries are pursuing commercial opportunities. We are working with UKTI, UK-based companies and inward trade delegations, and British companies already active in the Kurdistan Region to position the UK as the KRG's partner of choice.

UK-Kurdistan Region governmental links

5. We request a progress report from the UK Government on whether the joint ministerial committee agreed with the KRG in May 2014 has yet met and has an agreed programme, and on progress made so far in mentoring the KRG in civil service and public sector reform. (Paragraph 58)

The relationship between the Government and the KRG spans a range of areas, including security, commerce and prosperity. In 2014, British Secretaries of State visited the Kurdistan Region of Iraq on four separate occasions, including two visits by the Foreign Secretary, a visit by the Defence Secretary and a visit by the Secretary of State for International Development. This comes in addition to visits from Junior Ministers and the Government's Security Envoy to the Kurdistan Region General Sir Simon Mayall, and regular visits by the British Ambassador to Iraq and the day-to-day work of our active and well-regarded Consul General in Erbil.

The first meeting of the UK-KRG Bilateral Forum, which had been agreed during Prime Minister Barzani's visit to London in May 2014, had been scheduled to take place during a follow-up visit of PM Barzani in December. It did not prove possible to arrange the forum in advance of this as the KRG's senior leadership had, understandably, been focused on tackling ISIL. Unfortunately PM Barzani was unable to visit in December and we are now working to organise the forum for early 2015.

The UK continues to provide, as it has since 2007, a programme of training and capacity building for senior KRG civil servants through the National School of Government – International (NSGI). Most recently NSGI ran a programme of workshops for KRG civil servants in Erbil. These covered a range of subject areas focused on enhancing KRG public administration and service delivery.

The FCO's presence in the Kurdistan Region

6. The FCO has stated that it is committed to having a permanent consular presence in Erbil for the foreseeable future. This is welcome, given the strategic importance of the Kurdistan Region and the importance of strengthening links with its government and people. However, current consular arrangements are simply not acceptable for the UK: a permanent Security Council member deeply involved in diplomatic and military efforts to repel Islamist terrorism in Iraq and Syria and to resolve both countries' political crises, particularly given that other states, less deeply involved in these issues than the UK government, have some time ago secured bespoke premises. The FCO must now make it its priority to ensure that work proceeds on new consular premises, as a concrete demonstration of the UK's commitment to relations with the Kurdistan Region and in recognition of the importance of the Region and its government to the UK, particularly as partners in the fight against terrorism. We also ask the UK Government to take steps to ensure that the Consulate General is staffed to a level commensurate with its current importance to UK interests. (Paragraph 64)

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion. The FCO fully recognises the need to have an appropriately resourced HMG platform in Erbil and are working urgently to deliver this at the earliest possible opportunity. Identifying and obtaining an appropriate and secure site for a new Consulate General in Erbil has not been a simple process. The KRG has however, now allocated a plot and we are liaising with them regarding the development of this land.

Changes to the security situation in 2014 necessitated that we review HMG's requirements of the new CG in order to ensure we are able to meet HMG's political, security, prosperity and humanitarian objectives, both now and in the future. We have consulted those partners across government who will be represented on the platform, including DFID and the MOD, and planning is now progressing with a projected completion date for fit-for-purpose premises of 2017 or 2018.

Following the onset of the current crisis, the number of UK-based HMG staff in our Consulate General has more than doubled. This includes representatives from both DFID and the MOD. This is, of course, in addition to the excellent locally engaged staff employed by BCG Erbil, without which the office could not function. We continue to keep the total headcount under review.

Direct air links

7. Given the interest there appears to be in establishing a direct UK-Erbil air link, it is disappointing that this may have been held up by the need for a UK Border Agency inspection of Erbil airport. We press for such an inspection to be made at the earliest opportunity. (Paragraph 71)

The Department for Transport (DfT) currently advises UK air carriers against flying to Iraq due to significant security concerns.

Iraqi Airways have been permitted to fly to the UK, but indirectly, via an airport in the EU, where additional security screening is carried out. DfT has been engaged with Erbil International Airport and the relevant security authorities in the KRG for several years and officials have visited Erbil on a number of occasions. Guidance and training has been provided to the airport security forces by DfT and we were hopeful last summer that conditions might soon allow direct flights to the UK to start. The rapid advance of ISIL, however, and the deteriorating security environment intervened and the process was suspended.

Currently DfT are in discussion with the Consulate General on plans to re-engage with Erbil International Airport's security team, with the hope that the former pathway to direct flights can be reinstated in the near-term. The Secretary of State for Transport would make any decision on permitting direct air services in consultation with Cabinet colleagues, when we are satisfied that security risks have been appropriately addressed.

UK Government policy on the Anfal

8. The terrible events of the Anfal campaign conducted against the Kurdish people in the 1980s appear to meet the UN definition of "genocide". We understand the reasons that have caused the Government not to formally recognise the Anfal as a genocide, but also note that its approach has caused disappointment in the Kurdistan Region and that foreign governments have chosen to recognise past atrocities as genocide, notwithstanding the absence of a legal ruling by a recognised international tribunal. We encourage the UK Government to maintain a dialogue with the Kurdistan Regional Government on the issue, including on what judicial and nonjudicial criteria the UK Government may use to determine whether acts constitute genocide. We welcome the Government's recognition of Anfal Day and would encourage it to continue to reflect on other ways in which it could help identification with the suffering endured by the Kurdish people. (Paragraph 79)

Regardless of whether the term "genocide" is applicable in this case, it is clear that the crimes committed against the Kurdish people under Saddam Hussein's Anfal campaign were

monstrous. This is particularly true of the indiscriminate use of chemical weapons against civilians, such as in Halabja in 1988. While it can in no way alleviate the suffering experienced by so many Kurds, it is important to remember that Saddam Hussein's final conviction was for the crimes he committed against humanity.

It is HMG policy to mark Anfal Memorial Day. The former Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, Hugh Robertson MP, wrote an article for a Kurdish media outlet in 2014 to mark Anfal Day and expressed both sadness and support on behalf of the British people. The Government will continue to look for ways to mark this important day and honour the victims of Saddam Hussein's horrific crimes.

It remains the position of the Government that the recognition of genocide or similar crimes is primarily a matter for judicial decision, rather than for governments or non-judicial bodies. While acknowledging the terrible suffering of the Iraqi Kurds under Saddam Hussein, therefore, we do not believe that it is the Government's role to determine whether this did, or did not, constitute genocide. This position is consistent with HMG policy on such matters in other areas of the world.

UK policy on combatting ISIL in Iraq

9. The overall impression given by the UK Government's policy on ISIL in Iraq during 2014 is one of caution, responding to events as they unfolded rather than anticipating them, and we note that UK military assistance has been limited. However, we recognise that it was not unreasonable for the Government to proceed with caution, given the complexities of Iraqi politics and the UK's Iraq War legacy. It was right for the UK Government to assist the Peshmerga and to join in air strikes; on strategic grounds, because it was vital to support our friends and allies in the Kurdistan Region and to help build their morale, and on humanitarian grounds; to prevent appalling acts of violence and cruelty against whole communities, that call to mind some of the worst atrocities of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. We encourage the UK Government to use its influence to ensure that there is a proper record of the atrocities that have been committed so that, in due course, offenders may be brought to justice. (Paragraph 86)

We welcome the committee's support for the action that the Government, as part of the Global Coalition, has taken to halt ISIL's rapid advance across Iraq. The UK has a long-standing commitment to the importance of accountability and has provided support to the documentation of ISIL, and Assad regime, atrocities in Syria. We are currently scoping what other support we can provide to the documentation of violations and abuses of human rights in Iraq. In addition the UK co-sponsored the UN Human Rights Council Resolution on 1 September mandating the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to despatch an urgent mission to investigate and report on ISIL abuses in Iraq. The Mission arrived in Iraq on 19 November and will present their initial findings at the March session of the Human Rights Council.

The UK's military contribution to international efforts to counter ISIL has been substantial. We have carried out the second highest number of air strikes in Iraq among coalition partners, gifted weapons, trained over 1000 Kurdish Security Forces (KSF) and are gifting a further 1,000 counter-IED detectors and coordinating the coalition's counter-IED training and development programme.

10. Allied countries, led by the US, are to be commended for responding urgently following the ISIL surge of early August 2014, but, with hindsight, it appears to have been a miscalculation for the UK Government and its allies not to have assessed that the Peshmerga would require military assistance in order to defend a border of over

1000 kilometres against ISIL. With allied support, the Peshmerga now, happily, appear to be recovering territory lost to ISIL in August. (Paragraph 87)

Following its advance into northern Iraq in June of 2014, it was assessed that the Kurdish Region of Iraq was unlikely to be an intended target of ISIL. When it became clear that this was not the case however, the UK, alongside international partners, moved quickly to reinforce the capability of the KSF through the provision of equipment, logistical and intelligence support. As the Committee notes, this support allowed Kurdish forces to hold the line and subsequently reverse ISIL gains.

Iraq and Syria: one battlefield

11. Iraq and Syria are at present one indivisible battlefield and there is unlikely to be any real peace in the Kurdistan Region or the rest of Iraq unless ISIL in Syria is destroyed or, at the very least, badly degraded and starved of the capacity to move freely across the border. (Paragraph 90)

The Government fully agrees with the Committee's assessment that ISIL must be tackled in both Iraq and Syria. The UK is part of a Global Coalition pursuing a comprehensive approach to tackling ISIL, including undermining its ideology and access to both fighters and finance. This has included a military effort which has involved over 2000 coalition airstrikes across Syria and Iraq. These airstrikes have been instrumental in driving ISIL from the town of Kobane in Northern Syria. UK Reaper unmanned aircraft are operating over Syria to provide valuable surveillance in support of coalition efforts, while the UK is making a significant contribution to military action by carrying out the largest number of air strikes in Iraq of any country other than the US. Recognising that airstrikes alone will not defeat ISIL, the UK will make a significant contribution to the US-led train and equip programme for the moderate Syrian opposition who stand firmly against ISIL and its brutality.

Assisting the Iraqi federal government against ISIL

12. There was a price to be paid for the UK and other governments opting not to provide military assistance to the Iraqi government more quickly, including the increase of Iranian influence in the country. However, on balance, we consider that the UK Government was correct not to assist the heavily discredited government of Nouri al-Maliki, assessing, rightly, that it was part of the problem, not part of the solution. The UK Government is correct to have placed emphasis on the importance of an "inclusive" political process in Iraq on the need for Sunnis to recover faith in the country's democratic institutions. Diagnosing the problem is, in this instance, likely to prove far easier than prescribing the cure. The task of rebuilding Sunni confidence in Iraq is a formidable one: it requires political leadership from within the Sunni community and collective engagement, across the sectarian and ethnic divide, from Baghdad's political elites. (Paragraph 95)

We welcome the Committee's endorsement of the Government's support to the Government of Iraq. The UK is a major contributor to Coalition military strikes in Iraq, which have helped Iraqi ground forces halt and in some cases reverse gains made by ISIL. With the agreement of the GoI, the UK is also providing military equipment and training to the KSF to assist in the fight against ISIL as part of a coordinated coalition effort and we are coordinating the development of the coalition's C-IED training programme. We strongly support efforts of the Iraqi government to deliver its legislative reform programme with the aim of reconciling Iraq's different communities. We share the Committee's assessment that a unified political and whole of government response by the GoI will be vital to underpin military efforts to remove ISIL. We believe building confidence in Iraq's democratic institutions must be an Iraqi-led process, with steps taken by all political groups to overcome their differences. We will

continue to provide advice and expertise to the government to assist them in making these reforms. We also look to the KRG leadership to play an active part in rebuilding a political consensus in Iraq, and to continue efforts to improve cooperation between the GoI and the KRG.

Helping the Peshmerga

13. The UK's offer of equipment and training for the Peshmerga has been warmly welcomed in the Kurdistan Region and is helping the Peshmerga take on ISIL. Military assistance should be continued, on the basis of evidence that progress on the unification of the Peshmerga is continuing satisfactorily. The Government may also be minded to take into account the extent to which the Peshmerga and the Iraqi army are co-ordinating to take on ISIL in contemplating future gifting of equipment. We appreciate that Iraq's delicate constitutional situation is an element that the UK Government must take into account in determining whether and in what manner to make future gifts of military equipment. (Paragraph 104)

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation. We have worked closely with the Government of Iraq, and Global Coalition, to understand the needs of the KSF and ISF and identify where UK support can add most value. All the support provided to date has been provided or conducted with the approval of the GoI. We will continue to explore options for the provision of additional support to the GoI, including the KSF, factoring in operational requirements, export licensing obligations and constitutional sensitivities. We endorse the Committee's conclusion regarding the importance of unification of Peshmerga forces.

We are supporting the Iraqi Security Forces by providing Counter Improvised Explosive Device (C-IED) training to Peshmerga forces in the Kurdistan region. There has been a notable increase in the number, scale and lethality of improvised explosive devices in those areas where the Iraqi Security Forces, including Kurdish forces, are engaged in operations against ISIL. Creating a combat C-IED capability is therefore an integral part of the Coalition's Building Partnership Capacity (BPC) programme, which aims to rebuild the ISF. Subject to Parliamentary process, the UK intends to gift up to 1000 surplus VALLON (IED detectors). This will be supported by up to 30 military trainers who will provide C-IED training. We also have personnel deployed to the coalition headquarters in Baghdad coordinating the design of the coalition's C-IED training programme.

14. We seek clarification from the UK Government as to whether it would be possible for gifts to the Kurdistan Regional Government to be made direct to territory of the KRG or whether the federal government is within its right to insist that all gifts are routed via Baghdad. (Paragraph 105)

The current exemptions provided under the UN arms embargo on Iraq require that the gifting or sale of any military equipment to the KSF be certified by the GoI. There are no restrictions imposed by the arms embargo on where any inspection of equipment should take place.

Helping the Syrian Kurds

15. We ask the Government to clarify its policy on recognising and working with Syrian- Kurdish groups such as the PYD party that are resisting ISIL in northern Syria. We also ask it to clarify whether its categorisation of the Turkish-Kurdish PKK as a terrorist group or the PYD's decision not to join the Syrian National Coalition are considered reasons not to recognise or assist the PYD. (Paragraph 109)

We recognise that armed groups associated with the Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat (PYD) have been fighting ISIL for some time. The recent action in Kobane demonstrates that the

collective efforts of the international coalition and partners on the ground to derail ISIL are having some effect.

We remain concerned, however, by a number of aspects of the PYD's stated policies and objectives. The UK has consistently made it clear that it will be very difficult to provide any support to the PYD while they maintain links to the Assad regime and refuse to co-operate fully with the moderate Syrian opposition. We are also concerned that the PYD maintains some links with the PKK, which is a proscribed organisation in the UK. The PYD also needs to demonstrate a greater commitment to pluralism, human rights and respect for other political forces within Kurdish controlled areas.

We are also concerned that the PYD is attempting to pre-empt discussions on a final settlement for the Syria conflict. We do not support the PYD's unilateral announcement in November 2013 of forming a temporary administration in the Kurdish areas of Syria. This move was not conducted in consultation with the wider Syrian population or the international community. It will be for all Syrians to decide the exact nature of the political settlement in Syria as part of a transition process, including whether an autonomous region will be created for the Kurds in Syria.

Given these significant difficulties with the PYD position, the UK is not providing any direct assistance to the PYD. Over the past year, UK officials have met PYD representatives and delegations from the "cantons" of Afrin and Kobane. We will continue to engage with the PYD to encourage a more constructive approach on the issues outlined above.

The humanitarian crisis in the Kurdistan Region

16. The Kurdistan Regional Government and the people of the Region have responded with generosity and sacrifice to the influx of hundreds of thousands of displaced people from Syria and Iraq. Their continuing presence threatens to overwhelm the Region's economy and public service particularly if, as appears likely, conflict in Syria and Iraq continues for the foreseeable future. It would be disastrous if this ongoing crisis were to seriously destabilise the Region's economy or political system, and accordingly is in the foreign policy interests of the UK to work with allies in the UN, EU, NATO and other international organisations to ensure that the KRG is wellsupported to deal with this crisis. Whilst we agree that patience is likely to be crucial in order to defeat ISIL, the UK Government should note that a "long war" carries its own risks, amongst these a prolonged and economically debilitating humanitarian crisis, with hundreds of thousands of people unable to return to their homes, and the possibility of increased tensions between displaced people and the host community. (Paragraph 113)

The Government agrees with the Committee and notes the risk that a protracted conflict and humanitarian crisis may act to further destabilise the region. As the report states, the UK has pledged £39.5 million to the crisis. This has, as well as providing life-saving assistance to those most in need, also supported the establishment of a Joint Crisis Centre in the KRG to help facilitate coordination and cooperation between the relevant KRG ministries, departments, the international community and non-governmental organisations and thereby ensure an effective response to the humanitarian crisis. We would also echo the Committee's view that the KRG, alongside other regional governments and the Government of Iraq, have been extremely generous with their hospitality.

Resolving the status of the disputed territories

17. The Kurdistan Regional Government deserves credit for swiftly directing the Peshmerga to occupy Kirkuk and other disputed areas of northern Iraq at a moment of crisis in June 2014. The question now is what happens next. The KRG is right to insist on adherence to the Iraqi constitution, and to votes on the status of the disputed territories finally going ahead. However, there is much that could go wrong if the voting process is seen as unfair or lacking in transparency. The UK Government should use its influence to ensure that the voting process is transparent, addresses the various practical problems that the issue engages, is respectful of the rights of minorities as equal citizens of Iraq, and overall inspires the confidence of those taking part in it. Ideally the process would also proceed with the acceptance, or even involvement, of the federal government, and again we would encourage the UK Government to use what influence it has to this end. (Paragraph 124)

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation. While it is for the people of Iraq to decide the final status of the disputed territories, we have and will continue to encourage the GoI and KRG to work together to find a transparent resolution to this issue based on the provisions of the Iraqi constitution. We are also warning the KRG and other Iraqi political forces against taking unilateral or provocative measures in the disputed territories.

18. For the time being, much of the disputed territories are effectively a war zone, with entire communities still displaced from their homes. The KRG has rightly put back plans for local plebiscites for the time being, and we would encourage the UK Government to use its influence to try to prevent a peremptory vote. (Paragraph 125)

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation. While it is for the people of Iraq to decide the final status of the disputed territories, we have and will continue to encourage the GoI and KRG to work together to find a transparent resolution to this issue based on the provisions of the Iraqi constitution.

The constitutional future of the Kurdistan Region and of Iraq as a whole

19. We agree with the UK Government that for the time being it is far better that Iraq seeks to recover its unity and strength in order to defeat the common enemy of ISIL. It is also rational to be concerned about the possible consequences of Iraq's break-up. But the Kurdistan Region's desire for increased self-governance, or even independence, is itself rational, given its economic potential and demonstrable capacity for effective self-governance, and also understandable, given its recent history. We do not judge that independence is imminent, but it is a medium-term possibility, depending in large part on the Kurdistan Region's energy export strategy, for which the UK Government should be prepared. (Paragraph 141)

The Government is committed to a stable, united, democratic and prosperous Iraq. We strongly believe that the Kurds have an important role to play in building that future and that the benefits of remaining part of Iraq far outweigh those of independence. This is ultimately a question for the Kurds and all other Iraqis rather than for the UK. From our engagement with contacts in the KRG and Kurdistan Region more generally, we do not think that the KRG is currently arguing for a move towards full independence.

ISIL is a threat to all of Iraq's communities. The most effective way to combat ISIL will be moderate forces working together to defeat them, including close cooperation between the GoI and KRG. We believe that this is a time for unity against a murderous common enemy that has shown all too clearly its violent intent towards the Kurds and many others. Looking

forward, once ISIL has been defeated, the Government will remain committed to a united Iraq as we judge unity to be in the interests of all Iraq's communities.

20. It is for the Iraqi people to decide their future, but it appears to us that a looser federal model, permitting greater self-governance by its diverse mosaic of communities, offers best hope for Iraq remaining united and sovereign. Highly centralised rule under a "strongman" in Baghdad will never work. (Paragraph 142)

The Government agrees with the Committee that it is for the people of Iraq to decide what the exact relationship should be between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and the rest of Iraq. Whatever the arrangement, however, it is crucial that it provides for the rights of all Iraqis and all Iraq's communities. We also agree with the Committee that the "strongman" model characteristic of previous Iraqi governments is conducive neither to political stability nor the freedoms and rights that all Iraqis deserve. That is one of the reasons that the Government welcomed the appointment of Prime Minister Abadi in September and his appointment of the most representative and inclusive government that Iraq has seen for nearly a decade. We will continue to support PM Abadi in his efforts to rebuild public trust in the GoI and create the stable, united, democratic and prosperous Iraq that we all want to see.

21. If the Kurdistan Region is to become independent, it should be with the consent of the rest of Iraq. But the UK and its international partners should stand ready to help ensure that any clear expression of will in favour of independence, and on reasonable terms, is accepted and respected. (Paragraph 143)

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion.

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